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IRAN/ISLAMIC
REVOLUTION

ROBINSON: The threat of a new terrorist attack sponsored in some part by Iran is just the latest in a series of trouble that Islamic regime has caused this country. It's been three years to the day since the American hostages were released after 440 days... or 44... days in captivity, and as John McWethy reports, the Iranian revolution continues with its threat to the region and beyond, greater than ever.

MCWETHY: From the day the hostages were released, though the U.S. has paid little attention, Iran and its bitterly anti-American Islamic revolution have flourished. Many Western experts predicted the revolution would fail, that the Ayatollah Khomeini would soon die and Iran's floundering economy would collapse. All the predictions were wrong; instead, the revolution that brought down the shah of Iran in 1979, and brought in the Shiite Moslem holy man, may turn out to be of enormous historical significance, an event that some analysts now say parallels the early impact of the Russian revolution in 1917, an event that could dramatically change the Middle East, thereby affecting the entire world. GARY SICK (Former NSC Staff Aide): What's going on Iran is not just a change of regime; it is genuinely a revolution in the sense that things have changed drastically, fundamentally. Any regime in the Middle East has now got to look at that event and wonder, 'Is this going to happen here?' DR. ADEED DAWISHA (Royal Institute of International Arts): They do not believe in frontiers. They do not believe in international law. They do not believe in borders. Therefore, they give themselves the right to intervene in the affairs of any other country.

UNIDENTIFIED SHIITE MOSLEMS (Chanting in Farsi) MCWETHY: By trying to export its revolutionary fervor by encouraging a form of suicidal terrorism, Iran's revolution is perceived to be very much a threat to the region, not to mention the U.S. Barricades in front of the White House and the deaths of 241 American servicemen in Beirut in October are two vivid symbols of just how far Iran's revolutionary fever is reaching, but there is also Iran's continuing war with Iraq. A quarter of a million lives have been claimed by this brutal, three-year-long fight. It's a war the ayatollah refuses to settle. There are several thousand Iranians in Lebanon, some involved in terrorism. Iran is helping to support Syria's occupation of Lebanon by selling Syria cut-rate oil. Iranian-trained Shiite Moslems tried to overthrow the government of the small Persian Gulf nation of Bahrain, and with regularity the ayatollah threatens to block all oil shipments from the gulf. But there is much more to Iran's growing threat to the region, and some experts fear they have seen just the

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opening act of what could become a reign of terror. SICK: Even if Iran is not arming, manning, sending out terrorist teams, running the... planning it themselves, they are inspiring it just by their image and by the fact that more money than usual is available and floating around to groups that have this new, ideological fervor and that are prepared to do anything; they're prepared to die.

MCWETHY: U.S. intelligence sources sight two new threats from Iran. Suicide pilots at an isolated airfield called Bandar Abbas on the shores of the Persian Gulf, Iran has been training some 30 members of the ayatollah's revolutionary guard to fly small planes. Intelligence analysts say though members of this group have been flying F-04 fighters for several years, this new crop of student pilots is younger, less educated, more fanatic, eager to go to a place like Lebanon and fly a small plane there packed with explosives on a suicide mission. DR. DAWISHA: Many of these kids probably believe that if they go and die for the ayatollah, then their place in heaven is assured.

MCWETHY: New missiles: the U.S. intelligence community is tracking an arms deal that Iran is trying to complete for the purchase of two dozen French-made Exocet missiles, the same kind of missile that Argentina used with devastating effect in the Falklands war against Britain. Money for the missiles has already been deposited, sources say, in the Swiss bank account of a black market arms merchant operating out of Uruguay in South America. The U.S. is trying to block the sale. The U.S. Navy, among others, is very concerned about both the kamikaze pilot training and the arms deal for sophisticated anti-ship missiles. The U.S. has five ships in the Persian Gulf and another dozen or so, including an aircraft carrier, just outside the gulf in the Arabian Sea. All the ships are vulnerable as are hundreds of U.S. embassies and outposts throughout the region. SICK: They believe that, that this is the beginning of a movement that will unite the whole Islamic world and potentially the entire world. (Film clip: Shiite Moslems chanting in Persian.) They feel they have an idea that is so strong, so powerful that it justifies them, it's end justifying the means.

MCWETHY: Iran's new leaders used the taking of American hostages to gain worldwide recognition. In the process, the Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers discovered that coercion and terrorism were powerfully effective tools to further the goals of the revolution, a revolution which still lives in Iran and about which the world will be hearing much more. John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.